

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
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AL GRIGIS

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ASIAN REFUGEE EXODUS IN PERSPECTIVE

ANNCR:

SOUTHEAST ASIA, IN RECENT MONTHS, HAS BEEN THE SCENE OF A MASSIVE FLOW OF REFUGEES WHICH HAS AFFECTED TO SOME DEGREE NEARLY EVERY COUNTRY IN THE REGION. VOA'S AL GRIGIS HAS DETAILS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, NEARLY 400 THOUSAND PEOPLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA HAVE FLED THEIR HOME COUNTRIES. THE UNUSUALLY HEAVY HUMAN MIGRATION RESULTS FROM A VARIETY OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS. AND, IT'S PARTICULARLY DISTINGUISHABLE BY THE LARGE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES FLEEING COMMUNIST COUNTRIES AND BY THOSE ESCAPING FROM ONE COMMUNIST COUNTRY TO ANOTHER.

THE LARGEST REFUGEE GROUP IS REPRESENTED BY THE SOME 200 THOUSAND MOSLEM (ROHINGYEAS) BENGALI WHO, SINCE EARLIER THIS YEAR, HAVE MOVED FROM BURMA ACROSS THE NAF RIVER INTO BANGLADESH AT A RATE AS HIGH AS TWO THOUSAND A DAY. AS IN THE CASE OF OTHER MINORITY COMMUNITIES, THEIR MASSIVE EXODUS APPARENTLY IS THE RESULT OF RECURRING COMMUNAL CONFLICT -- IN THIS INSTANCE WITH THE BURMESE ARAKANESE.

A SECOND GROUP, THE OVERSFAS CHINESE, HAVE LONG BEEN SUBJECT TO RESENTMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE RETURN TO CHINA OF MORE THAN 133 THOUSAND CHINESE RESIDENTS IN VIETNAM IS UNIQUE. IT IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST KNOWN REFUGEE MOVEMENTS FROM ONE COMMUNIST COUNTRY TO ANOTHER. CURRENTLY, VIETNAM AND CHINA ARE APPARENTLY DEADLOCKED IN NEGOTIATIONS OVER TERMS FOR A MASSIVE SEA EVACUATION, WHILE THOUSANDS OF ETHNIC CHINESE IN VIETNAM ARE REPORTED TO BE WAITING WITH BAGS PACKED NEAR EVACUATION POINTS.

THERE ARE ALSO INDICATIONS THAT MANY ETHNIC CHINESE WANT TO LEAVE LAOS, SOME APPARENTLY FOR CHINA. AS WITH MANY IN VIETNAM, THEIR DESIRE TO LEAVE IS ATTRIBUTED TO THE WORSENING ECONOMY AND THE GRADUAL ELIMINATION OF PRIVATE TRADE IN LAOS.

ELSEWHERE, AN ESTIMATED 150 THOUSAND CAMBODIANS, INCLUDING 20 THOUSAND ETHNIC CHINESE, HAVE CROSSED INTO VIETNAM DURING THE LAST THREE YEARS. THERE ARE NO SUBSTANTIATED FIGURES FOR THIS YEAR OF THOSE CAMBODIANS WHO HAVE FLED TO VIETNAM AS REFUGEES FROM THE BORDER CLASHES OR FROM THE RIGORS OF LIFE IN CAMBODIA.

IN ADDITION, SOME TWENTY-ONE THOUSAND VIETNAMESE, INCLUDING SOME ETHNIC CHINESE, HAVE LANDED THIS YEAR IN NEIGHBORING SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES. THE FLOW OF BOAT REFUGEES FROM VIETNAM REACHED A PEAK OF 6,000 IN MAY AND IS CONTINUING SLIGHTLY BELOW THAT RATE.

CAPTAINS OF SHIPS THAT PICKED UP REFUGEES HAVE BEEN FORBIDDEN BY SOME ASIAN COUNTRIES TO DISCHARGE THEIR CARGOES OR TO SEND THEIR CREWS ASHORE WITHOUT HARD AND FAST GUARANTEES THAT THE REFUGEES WILL BE TRANSPORTED ELSEWHERE. TO OVERCOME THAT PROBLEM, THE UNITED STATES HAS ANNOUNCED IT WILL EXTEND ITS GUARANTEE TO RESETTLE ALL REFUGEES RESCUED BY SHIPS UNDER AMERICAN REGISTRATION OR OWNERSHIP, IF THE GOVERNMENT AT THE NEXT PORT OF CALL REQUIRES SUCH A GUARANTEE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES WILL BE ASKED TO ASSIST IN THE RESETTLEMENT OF THOSE REFUGEES RESCUED BY AMERICAN SHIPS WHO DESIRE RESETTLEMENT IN COUNTRIES OTHER THAN THE UNITED STATES.

JS/RCS